

Third Street Historic District
Third & Washington Sts.
Wausau
Marathon County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-117

HABS
WI-117
27-WASA
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HISTORY OF WAUSAU'S THIRD STREET HISTORIC DISTRICT

HABS No. WI-117

Wausau's Third Street Historic District is part of the original plat of the city of Wausau as surveyed in 1852. (Marchetti, p. 60) It is located three blocks from the Wisconsin River and Big Bull Falls. Buildings in the historic district are on the 200 block of Third Street which runs north to south and on Washington Street which runs east to west on the north end of the 200 block.

Because few early tax records of the city of Wausau survive, documenting the history of the Third Street Historic District is difficult. Buildings probably first appeared in the district in the late 1850's, since before that time the river islands and Main and Shingle Streets composed almost the entire village of Big Bull Falls.

The earliest surviving tax record, that of 1858, indicates that the only substantial building in the district was that of Jacob Paff, on the northwest corner of Third and Jackson Streets, where he later erected the present building.

A. B. Millard, an early pioneer, recorded in 1911 his reminiscences of structures as they existed in 1867. He remembered Paff's store with a residence above, Richard Baumann's hardware, tin shop and residence on the site of the present Baumann Building, and a garden on the southwest corner of Third and Washington where now stands the Frost Block.

Millard recalled Charles Woessner's building at 211 Washington where Woessner tailored men's clothes. Woessner's Tailor Shop is the only structure in Millard's recollections which stands. On the east side of Third Street, Millard remembered August Engel's watch repair and gun shop on the north corner. Engel's daughter married Valentine Ringle who later built the present Pilot Building on that spot in 1870. South of Engel's was Jacob Gensmann's shoe shop and residence. In the middle of the block Herman Miller and E. M. Mott conducted a grocery and lumbermen's supply business.

The rest of the lots in the Third Street District were still vacant of buildings even in the late 1860's.

The Wausau Third Street Historic District in the 1870's had few buildings: a tailor, general store, harness shop, a drugstore, a newspaper, and Baumann's Hardware. There were some residences and gardens.

Most of the present buildings were constructed in the 1880's and 1890's. There were still several general stores, drug stores, the hardware and the newspaper office. During those years new businesses appeared which were barbers, restaurants, clothing stores,

jewelry stores, a furniture store, a hotel and a business college. But the most common business was the saloon. In 1884 there were seven of them in or just outside the district. Gaming establishments and cigar stores were prevalent, sometimes in conjunction with the saloons. The second floors of most of the buildings had offices of physicians, dentists, lumbermen and some residences.

At the turn of the century the Third Street District was still dominated by the presence of saloons. But there were more clothing and tailor shops, and in 1900 The Fair Store opened. It was the first large department store and survived until 1960. A plumbing store also opened at that time.

During the teens, twenties and thirties, the most important and enduring businesses were the hotel, jewelry shop, Baumann's Hardware and The Fair Store. With prohibition in 1920, the saloons became restaurants. Grocery stores and bakeries appeared in the 1940's along with some vacant shops.

In the 1950's vacancies became a major problem in the Third Street District. Beauty shops, television and music stores and photography shops moved in and out. By the 1960's, Baumann's and The Fair Store were gone, the hotel had become a run down resident hotel, and vacant buildings dominated the street. This condition has continued to the present.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bird's Eye View of the City of Wausau, 1879.

"Brief Notes", Wausau Pilot, September 8, 1885.

Centennial Edition, Wausau Daily Record Herald, March 13, 1939.

"City Notes", Wausau Pilot, June 11, 1895.

History of Northern Wisconsin, The Western Historical Company, Chicago, 1881.

Insurance Maps of Wausau, Wisconsin, Sanborn Map Company, New York, 1884, 1891, 1898, 1904, 1912, 1923, 1939.

Klueter, Howard R. and James J. Lorence, Woodlot and Ballot Box, Marathon County in the Twentieth Century, Worzalla Publishing Company, Stevens Point, 1977.

- "Local Gossip and Home Items", Wausau Pilot, October 14, 1884.
- "Local Items", Wausau Pilot, August 27, 1870.
- "Local Miscellany", Wausau Pilot, July 2, 1881.
- "Local Miscellany", Wausau Pilot, August 6, 1881.
- Marchetti, Louis, History of Marathon County, Wisconsin and Representative Citizens, Richmond - Arnold Publishing Company, Chicago, 1913.
- Martin, George Alfred, Wausau in 1900, December 25, 1900.
- Millard, A.B., "Twenty-five Year Old Letter", Wausau Pilot, July 2, 1936, p. 1.
- "New Drug Store", Wausau Pilot, December 1, 1877.
- North Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, An Architectural/ Historical Assessment of the Area Proposed for a Downtown Shopping Center, Wausau, 1979.
- Pen and Sunlight Sketches of the Principal Cities in Wisconsin, Phoenix Publishing Company, Chicago, 1893, p. 230.
- Plat Book of Marathon County, Wisconsin, Northwest Publishing Company, Minneapolis, 1901.
- Real Estate Assessment Roll for the City of Wausau, 1853, 1877, 1880 - 1888.
- State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Wisconsin Survey of Historic Places, Madison, 1978.
- "Wausau's First Weekly Was Published in 1857", Wausau Daily Record Herald, June 20, 1958, p. 14.
- Wisconsin Magazine, Special Wausau Number, Madison Publishing Company, Appleton, 1952, p. 79.
- Wright's Wausau City Directory, Wright Directory Company, Milwaukee and St. Paul, 1883 - 1929.